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ABSTRACT

Marital satisfaction across the life cycle differs for men and women. To investigate family life satisfaction across positional roles, developmental categories, and socioeconomic status (SES), 100 husbands and wives (families) were administered the Heimler Schedule of Social Functioning (SOSF), which relates social function and stressors (work, family life, friends, mood, health, SES) to life satisfaction. The families were intact, nuclear, Caucasian units from a small midwest agricultural community, representing a range of children, SES, and occupations. An analysis of the results showed that the SOSF discriminates between family life categories on a number of measures. In general, family life satisfaction was greater in families that had passed the early establishment years. Females were more satisfied with friends than men but less satisfied with health and mood. In families with the oldest child in secondary school, work as a life satisfaction variable was highest among upper SES males and lower SES females. In families with the oldest child leaving home, work as related to life satisfaction was highest with upper SES females and lower SES males. Overall, upper SES males expressed the highest life satisfaction, while females in their childbearing years were the most satisfied. Except with lower SES families in which the oldest child was in secondary school, upper SES families reported greater satisfaction with friends. (Numerous statistical tables are provided). (BL

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Family Life Satisfaction Across Positional Roles, Family Development Categories and SES

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Paper presented at the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association Meetings, Snowbird, Utah, April 29, 1983

Abstract

Family Life Satisfaction Across Positional Roles, Family Developmental Categories and SES.

The Heimler Schedule of Social Functioning (SOSF) was administered to 100 husbands and wives (families) to determine the level of satisfaction perceived in their family situation. Families were divided into five child present categories as defined by Duvall's (1977) Family Developmental Framework, and into Lower and Upper SES groups. The hypotheses were: 1) Life Satisfaction scores in each Family Life Category will produce scores which are qualitatively different from each other category.

A. Satisfaction will be reported differently by the different family members according to their positional roles in each of the categories.

B. Satisfaction will be reported differently by positional roles.

C. Satisfaction will be reported differently according to socio-economic status.

Results showed all hypotheses were supported for some measures of the SOSF but not for all measures.

Family Life Satisfaction Across Positional Roles, Family Development Categories and SES

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The question of marital satisfaction across the life cycle has been studied by a number of researchers. A contradiction appears in that most wives (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) report highest satisfaction during the first and second years of marriage. Census data (Glick, 1977) report that the highest divorce rate occurs during the third year of marriage. Women who marry in their teens are twice as likely to divorce as women who marry during their twenties. It would appear that stresses which result in divorce are present very early in the marriage. Further, it appears that the older, i.e., the more experiences the marital partners have in coping with life events prior to marriage, the better able they are to cope with stress produced by the relationship. The divorce rate declines as the couple enters into the childbearing years.

The question of whether women and men see the effect of life events differently has been the concern of several researchers (Oppenheimer, 1974; Harry, 1976; Rollins & Cannon, 1974; Spanier, Lewis, & Cole, 1976). The need to look at the family differently at different categories in the cycle is particularly relevant to positional roles. Men perceive the world very differently at ages forty or fifty compared to women of the same age. While general satisfaction with the marriage may not indicate any gross discrepancies between male and female, the life events for the two partners are different. For example, in lower SES occupational earnings for men peak earlier in the life cycle than for higher SES occupations. This causes pressure for wives to contribute to the family income to avoid a deterioration in the level of living style. Early in the family life cycle, men in both upper and lower SES are more oriented and satisfied with

their family life, while at a later age they are looking beyond the family for sources of satisfaction. This change is a combination of occupation, health and time. As children grow older, parental needs and investment in their children change. The pressures of finances to raise and educate are less. Choice of hobbies, personal relationships, time demands of all kinds are more personally derived. The greatest number of male subjects (Harry, 1976) indicated happiness with their life when married, prior to having children, when questioned on dimensions of family, friends, health and excitement. They indicated satisfaction again when children were grown, from finances, hobbies, jobs, and general happiness.

Unfortunately, we do not have a similar study of females to compare with the males in Harry's study. However, Spanier et. al., (1975) in studying general marital satisfaction found that women indicate the greatest satisfaction during the Establishment of Stage One of Duvall's (1977) system. They indicate the least satisfaction during the School Age or Stage Four. According to Jurich (1979) this period is the most difficult for relationships with children as the children move into pre-adolescence.

These indications of differences of satisfaction suggest a need for study of different ages of families, roles of family members and economic resources.

In a discussion of stress as a wholistic concept, Becker (1976) lists a number of day-to-day conditions or social funcitons which are believed to produce stress. These include overwork, loss of sleep, physical exhaustion, dead-end type work, repeated obstacles and setbacks, and unfavorable situations. In addition to these factors, there are internal factors which cause stress. There are psychological conflicts caused by being unable to live up to one's own expectation and feelings of inadequacy in one's relationships with others.

Many of the relationships of childhood cause stress. Sensing a lack of security or happiness in one's parents, a hostile relationship with one's siblings, trauma such as illness or accident lead to anxiety and ultimately to stress. Socio-economic conditions of "hard times" and of affluence produce different behavioral reactions but effective stress in the family.

Hemiler (1967) developed the Hemiler Scale of Social Functioning (SOSF) as a diagnostic intrument and clinical tool. It attempts to provide a comprehensive measure of the satisfactions and frustrations experienced by the individual. Taylor (1970) found the SOSF as a good alternative to social history taking and as a means of assessing change in a client's life satisfaction over time.

In studies by Ross (1973) with alcoholics, the SOSF was not predictive for treatment success. However, with a group of college students significant differences were found between multiple recent life changes and altered health status.

Harrington (1970) at the Kaiser/Permanent Medical Facility in San Francisco found that in a patient population of 4,276 subjects, those with the lowest satisfaction score and high stress scores made fewer visits to the facility than those with higher satisfaction scores. The reasons for this are not clear.

METHOD

Design

The overall design of this research was a survey interview procedure utilizing demographic information, two paper and pencil instruments and a structured interview. Only responses to the SOSF are reported in this research.

Independent variables were Family Life Categories, Socio-economic status, and Positional Roles. In this case positional roles were limited to husband and

wife or male and female responses.

The Schedule of Social Functioning generated sixty scores combined into 5 dependent variables.

Subjects

The research sample consisted of 100 subjects (families). Families were accpeted if the parents had been married to each other at the time of the first birth and had been the only parents in the home to all existing children in the family. Families such as single parent, families with children from a previous marriage were not included unless the children had been raised from birth by the step parent.

All families were autonomous and reasonably selfsufficient. Based on Duvall's (1977) Family Life Categories subjects were chosen for the different groups. Ages of parents were disregarded. Families in Category 2 had one child from one week to 30 months of age. Families in Category 3 were defined by the oldest child aged 30 months to 5 years of age, plus any younger children. Families in Category 4 consisted of the oldest child being of elementary school age. Families in Category 5 consisted of a family with the oldest child in secondary school. Category 6 required a child to be actively preparing to leave home or having recently left home. This child was not necessarily the oldest child. Social class status was determined by a combination of income, occupation and educational attainment.

Ten families that fit into a lower middle-class description of social economic status (Otto, 1975; Hollingshead, 1950) and ten families that fit into an upper middle class depcription of social economic status were tested at each of the Categories 2-6 in which children were present in the home.

Families were typically residents of a non-metropolitan trading center community and surrounding small town. The central community of 17,000 has a

small state university and small branches of several manufacturing corporations. The farming area is largely held by individual families, many of whom, are third and fourth generation family owned agri-businesses. Families in this area are typically above the national mean in annual income and education. In January 1980, unemployment figures were 2% for the county.

The number of children in the home was assessed but did not determine inclusions of the family in the study. Due to the composition of the geographic area no non-Causcasian families were available to the researchers.

Occupations ranged from oil field roustabouts to physicians and judges.

Schedule of Social Functioning (SOSF) was given to all parents. The schedule, developed by Heimler (1967) and modified for this research, present statements of social function, which can be related to several kinds of stress. These are related to work, (for wage earners, in this research fathers); Home (for homemakers, in this research mothers); family life, health, friends, and mood. The use of the SOSF allows this research to view the families reaction to stress as a multifactied reaction.

The identification of levels of "success" or "absence of success" in various social functions support the existence of specific stressors at specific developmental periods. The SOSF evaluates many characteristics identified with good coping behaviors (Harrington, 1977). These include 1) the self-perception of successful functioning in established life role, 2) the relative lack of demonstratable psychopathology, 3) the possession of an optimistic outlook for the future, &4) the possession of good health. For example, an individual that indicates positive functioning at work and negative functioning with family could be expected to reflect stressors related to family but not to work. These would suggest a high degree of verdicality between events and feelings.

The SOSF also includes what they call "ambiguous stressors." This is a

vague feeling of discontent but inability to express the exact reason for the feeling.

Scoring of the Schedule of Social Functioning. The SOSF generated a score of five content measures for a total of five scores. Each item could be scored "yes", "no", or "perhaps". The total no scores in each area were subtracted from the total yes scores. Perhaps responses were dropped.

Statistical Design

A MANOVA version of a 5x2x2 Split Plot Factorial; SPF 52.2 (Kirk, 1968) was used for the analyses.

In addition to the MANOVA an discriminant function analysis (Tatsuoka, 1976) was used to determine which of the measures in the dependent variables made the greatest unique contribution to the significant differences determined by the MANOVA. A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between the five sets of measures on the SOSF.

The Split Plot Factorial indicates that two independent variables, Family Life Categories and Socio-economic class were analysesed for between group differences while the independent variable SEX was analysesed for within group differences.

Results

The SOSF was given to all subjects. A total of 200 persons or 100 subject families responded to 60 items. Responses for the SOSF indicate the number of times an item was responded by a yes response. Scores on the SOSF items include 1 for a yeas response, and 2 for a no response. Males answered the first 10 items concerned with work. Females responded to the second 10 items concerned with houseowrk. Three of the items were identical in the two groups. It was assumed for purposes of this research that non-working wives perceive their house-work role as comparable to the work role of their husbands. Every subject, male and female, responded to the remaining 50 items A high

scale on the SOSF is a positive score indicating high satisfaction with one's life. The five measures were SOSF I, HOUSEWORK-WORK; SOSF II, FAMILY LIFE; SOSF III, FRIENDS; SOSF IV, MOOD; and V, HEALTH.

All main effects were significant on the SOSF. The Family Life Categories, Test of Roots (Table 1) was significant for frequencies F (20,584) = 1.681, p .020 and F (20,584) = 2.156, p .003(for magnitudes. The univariate test (Table 1b) was significant for the measure HOUSEWORK-WORK, F (20,584) = 2,917, p .023 for frequencies. The resulting Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients (Table 1c) of HOUSEWORK-WORK (.762), MOOD (.458) and FAMILY LIFE (.449), were the significant discriminant function coefficients for this effect.

Mean responses for the measure HOUSEWORK-WORK (Table 4) were the highest in Categories 5 (Secondary School) and 6 (Launching). Upper SES males (9.40) and Lower SES females (8.70) had the highest mean scores in Category 5 with Upper SES females (8.50) and Lower SES males (8.60), highest in Category 5.

Socio-Economic Status

The multivariate analysis of variance yielded a significant MANOVA for the SES effect. The test of roots (Table 2) were significant for frequencies F (5,176) = 2.494, p .033). Univariate F's associated with the effect are listed in Table 2b. A discriminate function analysis was used as a follow up procedure to determine which of the dependent variable contributed uniquely to SES group differences. They indicate that FRIENDS (.908), and HOUSEWORK - WORK (.402) were significantly important in uniquely discriminating among Lower and Upper SES groups for frequency of responses.

Families in different SES groups responded in a significantly different manner on the variable, FRIENDS for frequency of response F (5,176) = 2.494, p .001). Sujbects in Category 5 (Secondary School) Lower SES reported mean higher satisfaction scores, (males 9.00; females 8.40).

Table 1

MANOVA Tables for SCSF Main Effect Family Life Categories for Frequencies

Table 1 a

Tests of Significance Using Wilk's Lambda Criterion and Canonical Correlations

Test of Roots	df	F	R
1 through 4	20/584.676	1.781*	.278
2 through 4	12/487.760	1.743	.222
3 through 4	6/354.000	1.955	.194
4 through 4	2/177.500	2.421	.163

Table 1 b

Univariate F Tests for Measures

Variable	MS	F (4,180)
SFHOMEYES	6.770	2.917*
SFFAMYES	5.588	2.254
SFPRNDYES	3.29[illegible]	1.673
SFMOODYES	2.350	1.351
SFHLTHYES	2.695	1.548

Table 1 c

Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients

Variable	1	2	3	4
SFHOMEYES	.762[a]	.504	.214	.433
SFFAMYES	.449[a]	.751	.444	.369
SFPRNDYES	.286	.347	.098	1.029
SFMOODYES	.468[a]	.074	.764	.322
SFHLTHYES	.026	.614	.346	.195

* $p < .05$

[a] Significant measure

Table 2

MANOVA Tables for SOSF Main Effect
Socio-Economic Status for Frequencies

Table 2 a

Tests of Significance Using Wilk's Lambda Criterion
and Canonical Correlations

Test of Roots	df	F	R
1 through 1	5/176.00	2.494*	.257

Table 2 b

Univariate F Tests for Measures

Variable	MS	F (1,180)
SFHOMEYES	.720	.310
SFFAMYES	5.120	2.064
SFPRNDYES	21.125	10.732*
SFMOODYES	3.920	2.253
SFHLTHYES	1.620	.930

Table 2 c

Standardized Discriminant Function
Coefficients

Variable	1
SFHOMEYES	.402[a]
SFFAMYES	.020
SFPRNDYES	.908[a]
SFMOODYES	.200
SFHLTHYES	.048

* $p < .05$

[a] Significant measure

In the Upper SES, males reported highest mean satisfaction (8.90) scores. Females in Category 2 (Childbearing) reported the highest mean satisfaction scores for all groups, (9.20). Subjects in Category 2, Upper SES males reported the least satisfaction scores (7.70). Lowest mean scores for Upper SES females for frequencies (8.00) were in Category 6 (Launching). Lowest mean scores in the Lower SES group were for Category 2 for males for frequencies (6.90).

With the exception of Category 5, Lower SES, Upper SES subjects had greater satisfaction scores with FRIENDS. The measures HOUSEWORK-WORK, FAMILY LIFE, MOOD, and HEALTH, were not significant for SES.

Sex. The multivariate analysis of variance yielded a significant MANOVA F for the Sex effect (Table 3). The test of roots F (5/176) = 3.660, $p < .004$, was significant. Univariate F's assoicated with this effect are listed in Table 3b. The discriminate function analysis determined that FRIENDS (.770), MOOD (.659), and HEALTH (.559), were important in discriminating among sex group members for FRIENDS (.574), HEALTH (.628), and MOOD (.616). Male and female subjects responded in a significantly different manner on three of five dependent variables, FRIENDS, MOOD, and HEALTH, for frequencies.

Friends. The variable FRIENDS was significant for sex for frequency F (5/176) = 4.270, $p < .040$. Females in the younger family categories had higher satisfaction scores related to FRIENDS than did males. Subjects in Categories 2 (Childbearing), 3 (Preschool), 4 (Elementary School) had higher mean satisfaction scores (7.90, 7.90, 8.20) than did males (6.90, 7.20, and 7.90).

In addition, Categories 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Secondary School) Upper SES females were higher (8.80, 9.20, 8.60, and 8.80) than males (7.70, 8.60, 8.40, and 8.20).

Table 3

MANOVA Tables for SOSF Main Effect
Sex for Frequencies

Table 3a

Tests of Significance Using Wilk's Lambda Criterion
and Canonical Correlations

Test of Roots	df	F	R
1 through 1	5/176.00	3.660	.307

Table 3b

Univariate F Tests for Measures

Variable	MS	F (1,180)
SFHCMEYES	.020	.009
SFFAMYES	2.000	.807
SFPRNDYES	8.405	4.270*
SFMCODYES	8.000	4.598*
SFHLTHYES	8.000	4.595*

Table 3c

Standardized Discriminant Function
Coefficients

Variable	1
SFHCMEYES	.096
SFFAMYES	.148
SFPRNDYES	.770[a]
SFMCODYES	.659[a]
SFHLTHYES	.559[a]

* $p < .05$

[a] Significant measur

Table 4

Mean Scores for Family Life Category x Positional Roles (husband-wife dyads) x Socio-Economic Status for the SOSF Measure I: HOUSEWORK-WORK.

	Upper SES		Lower SES	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2	7.50	7.20	7.20	7.80
3	7.50	8.10	7.70	8.10
4	8.40	7.80	7.60	8.00
5	7.70	8.50	8.60	8.40
6	9.40	7.30	8.40	8.70
	Measure II: FAMILY LIFE			
2	8.20	7.70	7.70	8.20
3	8.80	9.70	7.80	8.90
4	9.30	9.00	8.70	8.80
5	8.10	8.50	8.70	8.60
6	9.20	8.60	7.90	8.50
	Measure III: FRIENDS			
2	7.70	8.80	6.90	7.90
3	8.60	9.20	7.20	7.90
4	8.40	8.60	7.90	8.20
5	8.20	8.80	9.00	8.40
6	8.90	8.00	7.10	8.20

Table 4 (con't)

		Measure IV: MOOD		
2	7.60	8.50	7.70	7.30
3	8.60	8.20	8.10	8.00
4	7.70	7.60	7.90	7.10
5	8.00	7.90	8.30	7.70
6	9.30	7.00	7.30	7.70
		Measure V: HEALTH		
2	8.10	7.80	8.20	8.20
3	8.90	8.60	8.80	8.80
4	9.10	8.30	8.50	7.50
5	8.20	8.40	8.90	8.40
6	8.90	8.50	8.30	7.40

Mood. MOOD was signficiant for sex F (5/176) = 4.598, p .033. With the exception of Upper SES females in Category 2 (8.50) all groups of females were lower in satisfaction for MOOD than were males.

Health. The measure HEALTH was significant for sex, F (5/176) = 4.595, $p < .033$. Males indicate higher mean HEALTH scores than do females for both Upper and Lower SES. Exceptions were for Upper SES, Category 5. Females (8.40) were slightly higher than males (8.20). In Categories 2 and 3, Lower SES means for males (8.20) and females (8.80) were equal.

Interactions

No significant two-way interactions were produced by the MANOVA or by the Discriminant Function Analysis.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

As previously discussed the SOSF discriminates between Family Life Categories on a number of measures. Family Life satisfaction is greater for families that have passed the hurdle of the early establishment years. The direction of satisfaction changes with the different family categories and age alone would not seem to define satisfaction.

Sex was significantly different for FRIENDS, MOOD, and HEALTH on the SOSF. Females indicated greater satisfaction with friends than did men but less satisfaction with their health and mood. It may be that in the context of the family, men are more satisfied than are females. The indication that the younger females were more satisfied with MOOD may indicate that the romantic notion of marriage is still in place but becomes less shiny with age.

The Old idea that men have better relationships than women is not supported by this research. How much this item response is effected by the population of non-working mother's is not clear. Additional research is necessary to compare mother's not working outside the home.

Limitations of the Study

The generalizability of this study was limited to a non-urban, agriculture, agra-business dominated middle western community. Obtaining a stratified sample strictly defined by the developmental framework criterion was not possible. Families that met the family criterion were not always representative of the population as a whole.

The subject population did fit a reasonable description of a traditional nuclear family concept. No family whose data were used in the 100 families presented an image of great stress or concern about their personal future or the future of their family. Their greatest concern was for the well being of their individual family members.

They typically expressed concern for the future but were optimistic about what lay ahead for their children.

Those families could be considered comfortable and successful. The half of the sample designated to be Lower Socio-economic were frequently enjoying high incomes, independent occupations, educations that suited their own choices. Few seemed to have more than the expected day to day stress. While several families were suspected of experiencing more stress than was indicated by their item responses they seemed to be coping adequately with that stress.

This research leaves a great many questions about family satisfaction to be answered. Further questions about changes in feelings about ones family over time, particularly between males and females should be addressed.

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